

BOOK REVIEW

GEORGE E. BURROWS and RONALD J. TYRL. 2001. **Toxic Plants of North America**. (ISBN 0-8138-2266-1, hbk.). Iowa State Press, 2121 State Avenue, Ames, IA 50014, U.S.A. (Orders: 1-800-862-6657, 1-515-292-3348 fax; www.iowastatepress.com). \$174.95, 1350 pp, 8 color plates, numerous line drawings, 8 1/2" × 11".

What a magnificent book this is! It is a hefty (nearly 1400 pp. and 8 lbs.) treatment of the plants in North America that are known to be toxic to humans and domestic animals. The combined insights of the two authors, a veterinary toxicologist and plant systematist respectively, provide a breadth and depth of coverage that make this work a worthy successor to the earlier books of L.H. Pammel (1911) and J.M. Kingsbury (1962).

The work organized for easy use. There is a brief introductory chapter, which includes a delightful dedication to the late Dr. J.W. Dollahite of Texas A&M University, who made important contributions to veterinary toxicology in through the middle 20th century. Then comes the alphabetically arranged treatments for 75 families of plants that are known to be poisonous. The treatments are divided into genera, and the treatment for each genus includes a consideration of the species. Nomenclature conforms to current floristic usage in North America. There is a general description of the plant and a statement of range and habitat that are designed to permit ready identification. Each toxic plant or group of closely related plants is given a discussion of the disease problems, disease genesis, clinical signs, pathology, and treatment & control. The page margins are wide, and printed there are line drawings and generalized distribution maps for each plant. Short phrases in boldface noting the topics in the text are also given in the margins. Structural formulas are provided for the various toxins that are discussed in the text. A nice touch is the colored photographs of 64 toxic plants, presented on 8 colored plates in the center of the volume.

After the families of known toxic concern, there is a less detailed chapter on 36 other families that are of doubtful or merely suspected toxicity. Then comes a short discussion on plant identification, a list of plants by their adverse effects, a list of plants of concern for dogs, cats, and other pets, an extensive glossary, and an index.

Each family treatment has its own list of references, and the lists are extensive and current. For example, the family Euphorbiaceae, which includes numerous toxic plants, has 194 entries in the list of references. These come from the veterinary, general toxicological, and botanical literature, and most of the references are from the past 25 years. Lengthy reference lists are given for other families as well, which make the book a rich bibliographic tool for researchers. A cursory pass-through showed all references to be from the English language literature.

A particularly attractive feature is the simple accessibility of the contents. A person needing information about a toxic plant (such information is often needed in a hurry) can locate the information easily and rapidly, and that is remarkable for such a large, encompassing book.

The book is an expensive reference work and doubtless some users will know of things that the authors might have included, but had the authors opted for perfection, the book would never have been completed. Instead of a piddly quibble here and there, we can all be grateful that the work was completed and made available to the great community of consumers of botanical and toxicological information.—*Theodore M. Barkley, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, barkley@brit.org*